



American Tract Society.

RESPONSIBILITIES
OF
THE PUBLISHING COMMITTEE
UNDER THE CONSTITUTION.

FEBRUARY, 1858.

PRINCIPAL POINTS OF THIS DOCUMENT.

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AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PUBLISHING COMMITTEE UNDER THE CONSTITUTION.

The Constitution is not only the *law* by which the Society is bound, it is also a solemn *covenant* with God and the Christian community—a guarantee to all donors, testators, patrons, and purchasers, of every name and locality, from Maine and Minnesota to Texas, that the Society shall be conducted on the principles of union therein defined. Among the stipulations for guarding and perpetuating the catholic character of the Society as defined in the first article, peculiar provisions are made as to the mode of election and the powers and duties of the Publishing Committee by whom alone the issuing of any publication can be sanctioned.

The first and fundamental article is: "This Society shall be denominated the American Tract Society, the object of which shall be to diffuse a knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of sinners, and to promote the interests of vital godliness and sound morality, by the circulation of religious tracts calculated to receive the approbation of all evangelical Christians."

The fourth article provides that "the Society shall *annually elect a Board of Directors*," which with the Life Directors now contains about twenty-five hundred members.

The fifth article provides that "*the Board of Directors shall annually elect*, by ballot, a Publishing, a Distributing, and a Finance Committee, the members of which three committees shall constitute an Executive Committee to conduct the business of the Society," which three committees monthly report all their proceedings in their minutes to the Executive Committee for approval by the whole body.

The sixth article further protects the catholic principle of the first, and guards against the controlling influence of any one denomination, by providing that "the Publishing Committee shall contain no two members from the same ecclesiastical connection," and that *"no tract shall be published to which any member of that Committee shall object."*

The eighth article provides that as far as practicable the benefits of the Society shall be extended equally to "all parts of the United States."

These provisions are definite and unquestionable. The Publishing Committee can only be elected by the Board of Directors; they are to be governed in their action by the principles of the Constitution,

especially the first and fundamental article; and no tract can be published by any act of the Society, or of the Board, or of the Executive Committee, which the members of the Publishing Committee do not unanimously concur in approving. The Constitution thus provides for constantly recurring periods of excitement on particular subjects, when, out of the many thousands of members dispersed throughout the country, a comparatively small number agitated by that subject might constitute a majority of those present at an anniversary. This might have been the case some years since in the excitement on Freemasonry, which centred in the state of New York, and was estimated to have occasioned dissensions and divisions in no less than three hundred churches.

Suppose that at some meeting of the Society in a time of such excitement, a majority of those present should be intent on issuing a Tract on Infant Baptism, or on Prelacy, or on Slavery, or on Freemasonry, or on the Maine Law, they have no power to do it by a direct vote, nor in any other way, unless the Publishing Committee, elected as above by the Board of Directors, shall unanimously approve it. The Society, by giving a year's notice, and a vote of two-thirds of the members present at an annual meeting, can change the Constitution; but until changed, no Tract can be issued which in the judgment of any one of the Publishing Committee, now comprising six estimable pastors of churches, is not both adapted to be useful and in accordance with the catholic principles of the Society.

These guards of the Society's catholic character were well understood in its organization to be very strict, and to apply to all subjects. "*No tract*" could be published to which any member of the Publishing Committee should object. Many fears indeed were entertained that that Committee so constituted might not agree in the great distinctive essential truths of salvation; but the design *to secure and perpetuate harmony among evangelical Christians in all the Society's proceedings* was questioned by none. It is written as with a sunbeam on the Constitution, and confirmed by the whole course of action under it. Happily it was soon found that in the great practical truths of salvation all the members of the Publishing Committee were one. They equally loved and gloried in the Christ-exalting truths of such works as the Pilgrim's Progress and Saints' Rest; and the Holy Spirit sealed and sanctioned the publications issued, in the conversion of multitudes of souls. So fully was this principle of harmony understood and recognized by all the Committees as the basis of the Constitution, that no act of either Committee has been carried into effect to which there was known to be a dissenting voice; and the convocations of the Society have been jubilant occasions of congratulation, thanksgiving, and praise, in which for thirty years a disturbing "nay" was never heard. God has been in the midst of her. The good done throughout our land and world has filled heaven with rejoicing.

The founders of this Society had before them the bright example

of harmony in the parent Religious Tract Society formed in London in 1799, whose original "Address to Christians," Tract No. 1, by Rev. Dr. Bogue of Gosport, gives their *principles of union* as they have been reiterated thousands of times by union Tract Societies in all parts of the world. Having defined a religious Tract as "a select portion of divine truth designed and adapted to make the reader wise unto salvation," it gives the following as first among "the qualities that should be sought for, and are united in a good Tract"—

"*Pure truth.* This, flowing from the sacred fountain of the New Testament, should run from beginning to end, uncontaminated with error, undisturbed with human systems; clear as crystal, like the river of life. There should be nothing in it of the *shibboleth* of a sect; nothing to recommend one denomination, or to throw odium on another; *nothing of the acrimony of contending parties against those that differ from them;* but pure, good-natured Christianity, in which all the followers of the Lamb who are looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life, can unite with pleasure, as in one great common cause. Nor should any worldly scheme be interwoven with the truth, or attempted to be concealed under its folds. Here should not be seen the slightest vestige of any carnal end, in any form or for any purpose, however laudable some may think it; nothing but divine truth, unmingled, unadulterated, and pure as it came from heaven, fit for the whole human race to imbibe."

On these principles the Society in London have acted fifty-eight years with success and "unbroken harmony." When the American Tract Society was formed at Boston in 1814, though its founders were of one denomination, it adopted the London Society's "Address to Christians" as its first tract, and in its constitution defined its object to be, "*to promote the interests of vital godliness and good morals by the distribution of such tracts as shall be calculated to receive the approbation of serious Christians of all denominations.*" That language substantially was adopted in the first article of the Constitution of the American Tract Society formed in New York in 1825, with additional guards of the catholic principle in the sixth, as above; and the spirit of the London Society's address characterizes the eloquent original "Address of the Executive Committee" of this Society, written by Rev. Dr. Spring, and constituting Tract No. 1 of the present series. That address represents the new-formed Society as "a great institution whose operations shall extend over our whole country, and as far as practicable even beyond its limits;" in which "*the twofold union of various local institutions, and of Christians of different denominations,* all applying their powers in a common direction," shall "unite the concurrence and feeling of this free and enterprising nation;" and by "*the best and strongest affections of the human heart, gathered from the remotest parts of the land, lengthen the cords and strengthen the stakes* that bind together the body politic;" and adds, "It cannot be carried forward without harmony of design and united perseverance."

The testimonies to the reality and saeredness of this union from documents and recorded acts would fill volumes, and constitute a large and delightful portion of the history of these affiliated institutions. United in this bond of love, the American Tract Society proceeded for more than thirty years, its prospects never brighter, nor the instrumentalities employed more efficient, nor the blessing more richly descending; and the long-tried, self-denying donors and laborers wished to continue their contributions and harmonious toils, under the guidance and smiles of their ascended Redeemer, till they should meet before him to recount the triumphs of his grace.

But God saw that their faith was to be tried even in the most tender point, **THEIR ONENESS IN CHRIST.** The nation had become convulsed with a great absorbing sectional issue, blending polities, morals, religion, and local and denominational interests and prejudices, rending communities, churches, and even the most endeared social and family ties; when certain religious journals, chiefly representing a portion of a large and respected Christian denomination in one section of the country—against the wishes of other portions of their own denomination and of the Christian community among whom they dwell, and against the wishes of other evangelical denominations largely represented in the Society's constituency—undertook to influence the institution to take part in the national strife by issuing anti-slavery tracts.

How could the Publishing Committee meet such a demand? The next demand might be from other large bodies of Christians that the Society should issue Tracts against what they regard as "Abolition fanaticism." The next demand from still other bodies might be to issue Tracts against what they regard as wrong views of Baptism, or of the orders of the clergy, or church discipline, or some other subject equally known to be *in controversy among evangelical Christians.* Who does not see that the first principles of the Society forbid the Publishing Committee to take sides in any such controversy, or comply with any such demand? And who does not see that by refraining from publishing Tracts on points thus controverted, they imply no approval of what either party may see in those points to be condemned? Suppose such demands should be multiplied and pressed till the Society was threatened with revolution and ruin, can those appointed to "transact its business," whatever their personal preferences may be, assume the power to violate the solemn vows the Society has assumed for the fulfilment of its saered trust? Must they not rather still commit its interests to God, who has promised never to forsake those who humbly *trust in Him?*

The Publishing Committee explicitly said in the Annual Report for 1856, that if there were tracts on "duties and evils" connected with the subject of slavery, "*in which evangelical Christians north and south would agree,*" they knew no reason why they should not be approved

and published. But the demand now made upon them goes farther: it is that they shall issue what one body of evangelical Christians strenuously *demand*, and other bodies of evangelical Christians as strenuously *resist*. This was essentially the case when a few months since they were called to act on a proposed tract on the "Duties of Masters," in reference to which, in the present excited state of the public mind and under the influence of erroneous, conjectural, and conflicting statements, there has been a confused and almost inexplicable diversity of opinion. In itself the tract was from the first regarded by several friends of the Society in the southern states, to whom a proof was early sent, as in some parts liable to grave objections. It is also objected to by anti-slavery Christians of the north as tacitly sanctioning the system of slavery, yet many such demand its issue as *the first of a series* which shall ultimately condemn slavery; while a great body of Christians at the north, and all at the south unite in protesting against the Society's entering on any formal discussion of a subject so bitterly controverted among the followers of Christ. Our most enlightened southern brethren tell us plainly, in love and confidence, that the community among whom they dwell have been so goaded by what they regard as misrepresentation and abuse from northern presses, and such is the pervading dread of incendiary documents, that for the Society's colporteurs, (who last year were welcomed, bearing messages of salvation, into more than two hundred thousand families in the slaveholding states,) to be supplied with any Tract on the subject of slavery would create universal alarm; and that if this subject is to be agitated at all in the Society's publications, there can be no access to the people of those states. Many of our brethren at the north are evidently misinformed as to the nature of these insuperable obstacles. Let them visit or communicate with their warm-hearted intelligent southern brethren, one in Christ with themselves, and seeking the same salvation for bond and free, and it may be better understood why a spark on this subject is dreaded, and how every pressure upon the Society from the north to publish on this subject but increases the alarm.

The Publishing Committee were not called either to justify or condemn the views of any parties in this controversy; but surviving authors of the Tract objected to its publication, and testimony from all parts of the south and south-west, confirmed by a general cessation of coöperation immediately following the action at the Society's last anniversary, made it unquestionable that to issue it might close the door of access to eleven millions of undying souls, the great body of whom are not implicated in slavery, and at the same time sunder the Society's constituency at the north. To take action which might lead to such results with no warrant from the Society itself, they unanimously judged would be an abuse of the trust reposed in them, and in this view the consideration of the proposed Tract was discontinued.

Let it be understood then by every member and friend of the Soci-

ety, that the Publishing Committee, in fulfilling their responsibilities to God and the Society's whole constituency, north, south, east, and west, simply, conscientiously, and unanimously declined to issue a proposed Tract, which a large body of evangelical Christians *demanded* especially as a prelude to other Tracts on slavery, and to which other bodies of evangelical Christians having equal rights in the Society *objected*. This, this only was their action, leaving themselves and their successors to be guided by the gracious providence of God in all the future.

But the question arises, **WHAT NEW RESPONSIBILITIES WERE DEVOLVED ON THE PUBLISHING COMMITTEE BY THE SANCTIONED REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF FIFTEEN?**

Such a Special Committee (like one which had then been appointed by the American Board of Foreign Missions) had been called for in one or more weekly journals previous to the anniversary, May, 1856, when the excitement was such that the Society's business meeting filled the late Brick church. At that meeting a proposal for the appointment of this Committee was early introduced, accompanied by the declaration that no revolution of the Society was desired, that what the Publishing Committee had reported as to the subject of slavery was substantially satisfactory, but that sundry financial and other questions had been suggested as to the Society's business operations, and the appointment of such a Committee would be acceptable to many. The motion was strenuously opposed on the ground that there was no occasion for it; and after long discussion the whole subject was laid on the table by a vote declared by the President. That vote, however, was disputed: a call was made for the yeas and nays; and in the impracticability of ascertaining, at so late an hour, who were entitled to vote, another audience being then in waiting at the Broadway Tabernacle to attend the religious exercises of the anniversary, and some members of the Executive Committee being ready to challenge investigation into its business transactions; and that Committee having voted on the previous day that "should it be the pleasure of the Society" to appoint such a Special Committee, they would "welcome and facilitate all their inquiries," the point was reluctantly yielded, and a Special Committee of Fifteen "appointed to inquire into and review the proceedings of the Executive Committee and report."

To the Society's financial and business operations a special committee from the Committee of Fifteen gave laborious attention, with every assistance that could be afforded them, and with results reported as highly satisfactory; but the question now before us is the influence of their action on the responsibilities of the Publishing Committee.

It is much to be regretted that a highly respected member of the Committee of Fifteen, who was not present to assist in their "*inquiries*" into the history and grounds of the proceedings of the Publishing Committee for thirty years, virtually prejudged the case in a paper

sent them which, though none of its distinctive positions were adopted, has since been given to the public; especially as the paper is evidently based in part on misapprehensions reiterated then, as of late, in certain journals, and which it was hoped the investigations of that Committee would effectually remove. Widely different views on the interpretation of the Constitution and views quite in harmony with the Society's general course, were presented to that Committee in another letter apologizing for absence, from Dr. Auderson of the Baptist church, President of the University at Rochester, who ultimately declined giving his name to their report, chiefly on the ground that it seemed to him "ambiguous, and likely to fail of adjusting the great question at issue." A third paper was also addressed to them from a State Branch Tract Society, with the signature of their esteemed President, of the Episcopal church, bearing their distinct and earnest protest against the Society's violating the catholic pledges of its Constitution by issuing Tracts the South could not receive on the vexed subject of slavery.

Could these three highly esteemed brethren have met the investigating committee in free, kind, and intelligent Christian conference, and they and the whole committee have fully availed themselves of the experience of the members of the Publishing Committee and officers, and had their deliberations been delayed, as their honored Chairman would have preferred, till after the year of the Presidential contest, the final result of such "inquiry and review" might have united the intelligent judgment of the true friends of the Society in all parts of the country. Such a result, thus obtained, it appears to us must have embraced at least the following facts as incontrovertible:

1. That the intent of the Society's constitution was to secure and perpetuate *harmony* among all who should engage in it, and that without the hope of this the Society would not have been formed.
2. That the Society has never published any thing in favor of slavery, expressed or implied.
3. That its publications give the whole testimony of the Bible in reference to slavery, in the language of Inspiration.
4. That its refraining from discussions of the subject so far as controverted among evangelical Christians, is from a conscientious regard to what the Committee believe the Constitution and fundamental principles of the Society require, and not from want of deference to the wishes of any of its members.
5. That by silence on controverted points they express no opinion as to the magnitude of the good or the evil involved in those points, whether pertaining to baptism, the orders of the clergy, slavery, or any other subject whatever; and that three small volumes from which *omissions* in reference to slavery had been specially complained of, were to be discontinued.
6. That the Committee are bound steadfastly to adhere to the true principles of the Society's constitution, however excited portions of the community may be on any particular topic.

7. That the subject of slavery is now so identified with political, national, sectional, and denominational strife, that its free discussion in any of its aspects would be liable to alienate great bodies of evangelical Christians, both at the north and at the south.

The statements of the honored Chairman of the Committee of Fifteen in presenting their report to the Society would seem to show that their deliberations as to *slavery*, (a term not mentioned in the action of the Society appointing them, nor by him or any other speaker during the anniversary when that report was presented and adopted,) were more summary than had been anticipated. He said: "On the 17th of March ten of the Committee met at the Tract-house, where they were received most cordially by the Executive Committee, who threw open to them every door to the investigation. After seeking divine counsel, it was proposed that each member should, in the first place, speak out his own sentiments freely. We thus, said he, had a confidential interchange of views, beginning with the person nearest to the chair, and around in order, concluding with the chairman. Each one spoke out fully and freely his own opinions and views. We were where we had a right to speak freely, and by the blessing of God each one ascertained for himself that that line upon which the Society had been operating for more than thirty years, was one upon which the committee, with all their diversities of opinion, could concur. If it had not been for the *business* operations of the Society, that were also committed to our investigation, in less than *two hours* those ten members of the committee would have concurred in such a report as would be presented to-day. This unanimity," said he, "struck us all with delightful and overwhelming surprise. If the dew ever descended upon Hermon and the hills of Zion, it descended upon the committee at that meeting." Under the influence of such a statement, the report was read, declaring in its preamble, "It is to be remembered, that the Tract Society was founded, *not to discuss disputed questions* in theology, or morals, or politics, but to spread the truth in its simplicity and purity as it is held and loved by all evangelical Christians," "and the Committee cherish the hope that by the Divine blessing their views (of the subject of slavery) will meet the approbation of their Christian friends in *all parts of our country*." In almost breathless suspense lest an excited discussion like that at the previous anniversary should be renewed, the adoption of the report was moved and seconded and carried without discussion or time for deliberation, when the Society paused and united in thanksgiving to God for so peaceful a result. That report had not been shown by the Committee of Fifteen either to the Publishing or the Executive Committee until heard by them as read at the anniversary, and as its object was to review their own proceedings it was heard by them in silence.

But the question recurs, What new responsibilities did that report devolve on the Publishing Committee? It devolved on them, as the constitution does, and as the Society has always done, the responsi-

bility of judging what specific Tracts could be consistently issued. This duty was neither referred to, nor assumed by, the Special Committee. Even as to the propriety of issuing the tract on the "Duties of Masters" which the Publishing Committee had then under consideration, and of which proof impressions, on the request of one of the Committee of Fifteen to see it, were placed in the hands of all the members of that Committee, they refrained from expressing any opinion. They recommended general principles of action which they hoped might harmonize the Society and the Christian community: the prominent points of which are, in their introductory statements affirming the catholic character of the Society, and in their first resolution giving the fundamental article of the constitution entire, as above quoted; in their fourth resolution expressing their judgment that the "political aspects" of slavery lie entirely without the proper sphere of the Society, but that "moral duties" and "moral evils and vices" connected with it "can and ought to be discussed in a fraternal and Christian spirit;" and in their last resolution expressing great confidence in the wisdom of the Publishing Committee, that their action in carrying out the principles of the previous resolutions would be such as would "tend to promote the widest and best usefulness of this Society throughout our whole country."

On receiving and considering that report, weighing at one view its several recommendations, guards, and limitations, the Publishing Committee, desiring to give all possible deference to the judgment of their highly esteemed and cherished brethren and coadjutors, found no difficulty in acting according to their own understanding of the principles suggested: the sum of which is, wisely and discreetly to present scriptural views of these "duties" and "evils" in a manner that shall not be identified with political or sectional strife, and shall be consistent with the catholic principles of the Society, and its best interests throughout all our boundaries. That these duties or evils are to be formally announced as growing out of slavery and thus discussed in specific tracts, is not expressed in the resolutions; and the difficulty, if not impossibility of issuing such tracts, and yet avoiding the "political aspects" of slavery, has been already referred to. The Publishing Committee are wisely, under their responsibilities and according to their best discretion, with a proper regard to time and circumstances, to present scriptural views of these and all other moral duties, evils, and vices. This they have ever endeavored to do. They certainly have issued, in reference to the subject in question, all that God has revealed, in the very words of inspiration.

An insuperable obstacle to issuing special Tracts on the "duties" or "evils" growing out of slavery was occasioned, as already intimated, by the language of the Special Committee, especially in the latter part of their fourth resolution; which, heralded as it was as an anti-slavery triumph, and as indicating a radical change in the course to be pursued by the Society in reference to slavery, by which it would make itself a party in the pending political strife, excited such alarm and

opposition from evangelical Christians in large portions of the country as greatly to complicate the difficulties which previously existed.

The intense desire of many that the Society should issue specific Tracts against slavery, has given rise to various PLANS AND INGENIOUS ARGUMENTS for its doing this, though it be, as above appears, in opposition to the plain letter and spirit of the Constitution.

Prominent among these is *the magnitude of the evils* alleged to be connected with the system of slavery. On this point the Publishing Committee in their official relations have no call to question the opinions of the most zealous; and they rejoice to aid in diffusing the gospel of Christ as the great effectual remedy of all the evils which curse our sin-ruined world. But what they do must be within the limits of the trust assigned them. And more than this: in judging what Tracts are best adapted to this end, they may believe that the plain inculcations of the word of God as harmoniously understood by his people and richly owned and blessed in all parts of our land, are *the most effectual means possible* for the Society to secure the desired result.

It is further asked, Is not the Society bound to publish *the whole will of God* on all subjects? It does this as his will is revealed in his inspired word, adding plain practical comments and instructions. The great theme of salvation by Christ, pervading the whole Bible, the Society inculcates perhaps as clearly and forcibly as it is proclaimed in any pulpit of the land, and with as evident tokens of the divine approval. But if the question is whether the Society is bound to inculcate what is *in controversy among evangelical Christians*, that which large bodies of them do, and other large bodies of them do not, regard as the truth of God, here it is called to pause by the limits of the trust it has assumed to fulfil.

Again it is asked, Have not the Publishing Committee already violated this principle by issuing, *on Intemperance and kindred subjects*, *Tracts in which they did not expect evangelical Christians would be agreed?* We answer, No. On this point, there is in some minds an evident misapprehension. The Committee may have been led, as tracts were presented from time to time, to issue *too large a proportion* on the topics referred to, especially as the great temperance reformation, based on strictly gospel principles, came forward side by side with the progress of this Society. But the Committee have never adopted indiscriminately tracts on temperance or any other subject. Their action is not on *subjects*, but on specific *tracts* proposed for publication. They have never sanctioned any tract in which they did not believe evangelical Christians would be substantially agreed; and if they now knew of any tract in the series of a contrary character, they would discontinue it. With all the iterations in late discussions, that the Society's Tracts on Temperance and kindred subjects have given offence to evangelical Christians, it may still be asked, What Tract thus gave offence? What was the objection? When and where was

it made? A distiller, and a drunkard even, though self-condemned, may fully approve a Tract showing that intoxicating drinks create an unnatural appetite, bring ruin in this life, and destroy body and soul in hell, and such a Tract may unite the suffrages of the Christian community.

It is further asked, May not the words in the Society's Constitution, "*calculated to receive the approbation of all evangelical Christians*," be construed to mean what, in the judgment of the Committee, *ought to receive* such approbation? But by what authority, or possibility, can the Publishing Committee decide what the Presbyterian, or Baptist, or Episcopalian, in one part of the country or in another, *ought* to believe on points known to be in controversy? and who could join a society conducted on this principle? Nor less practically absurd is the intimation that no objection to a tract is to be regarded, unless made by "evangelical Christians" *simply and abstractly considered as such*. On this principle, objections of Congregationalists to tracts advocating the divine right of prelacy or of Presbyterianism, should not be regarded, because they would object, not simply and exclusively as evangelical Christians, but as Congregational Christians. Who does not see that, as every evangelical Christian holds some sentiments not common to others, in the practical application of this principle tracts might be issued to offend and exclude any and every member of the Society. This and all other phrases of the constitution are by the constitution itself referred to the Publishing Committee, elected as those in whom confidence is reposed, to be acted on as in their sound discretion will best accomplish its main design in perpetuating the Society's harmony and usefulness.

The words of the Constitution just quoted, have also received another novel interpretation. First assuming that the Publishing Committee can only know what is approved by evangelical Christians through *the formularies of their respective denominations*, the inference is drawn that, as those formularies *refrain from adjudicating in terms on the subject of slavery*, therefore the Committee, [not, should also refrain, as seems the only legitimate conclusion from these premises, but] *may issue Tracts on slavery* in which evangelical Christians are not agreed, though it should expel the whole body of evangelical Christians in the southern states, divide and alienate from each other Christians of the northern states, and dismember the Society. So directly and plainly is this interpretation at variance with the natural import of the language of the Constitution, that the idea that its language could be interpreted to allow of the sundering of evangelical Christians by Tracts on *any subject whatever*, was, so far as we know, first suggested thirty years after the Society was formed, in an argument for the Society's publishing on slavery, and except in such an argument has been avowed by no one.

The Constitution, as above shown and distinctly testified by the founders by whom it was drawn, was intended to secure harmony, *not merely*

in points defined in church formularies, but on all subjects; and the fact that the Publishing Committee have ever since acted and are still acting on the principle of avoiding collision among evangelical Christians on any subject, is, like Leslie's "monuments and actions kept up," an unanswerable confirmation of this testimony. No canon of interpretation is better settled than that contemporaneous exposition has great weight, and that practice and acquiescence under a constitution for a period of years from the beginning fixes the construction. The Constitution was originally ratified by a Convention of Delegates from northern and southern tract societies united; and though the more immediate and palpable obstacle to be surmounted was the union of Christians of different denominations, and discussion on the subject of slavery had not then reached the same intensity as of late, yet the danger of alienation on this subject was clear to every reflecting mind. Then as now the very mention of slavery on a catholic platform would have been regarded as a watchword of division. The delegate from Augusta, Georgia, was placed on the Committee to nominate the Society's officers. At its public organization, as Rev. Mr. Summersfield, then from Baltimore, sat by the side of Rev. Dr. De Witt, and perceived heart meeting heart, he said to him, I hope this Society will be the means of cementing northern and southern Christians; and as, soon after, the late Rev. Joseph Brown from Massachusetts, of kindred spirit, was returning from a residence in Charleston, he called at the Society's house to say that any discussion of slavery must be fatal to Christian union. Nothing is more erroneous than the idea that differences on slavery were unknown or unconsidered in the Society's formation and early history.

But to look at this new interpretation somewhat further: Is it a fact, that the personal character and responsibilities of "all evangelical Christians" are thus merged and lost in their respective *denominations*? And is it a fact, that the sentiments of denominations are known only through their *formularies of faith*, and not at all by the acts of their General Assemblies, or general Synods, Conferences, Conventions, or Associations, and their solemn annunciations through the pulpit and the press? Or is it a fact that the tens of thousands of Baptist and Congregational churches throughout the country, and a score of other denominations or sects some of whose members coöperate in the Society, have such established and universally recognized *formularies*? There can be but one answer to these questions. The whole argument is evidently based on the assumption that the Society is not a union of individual Christians, but of *denominations*; contrary to the most familiar and well-known facts. The Convention that originally adopted the constitution unanimously substituted the phrase, "*all evangelical Christians*," instead of the phrase, "*evangelical Christians of all denominations*." "I myself," argued Rev. Mr. Summersfield, in proposing the change, "am not here as representing any denomination, but as an individual Christian wishing to unite with my brethren in advancing the Redeemer's kingdom," or words to that ef-

feet. The whole history of the Society shows that it consists of individual members by the contribution of \$20 each, and not of denominations. The facts, that the Committee in the practical discharge of their duties cannot, and need not consult every individual Christian throughout the country; that the officers are elected from different denominations; that its documents speak of the difficulty of harmony amidst their various doctrines and creeds; and that speakers from different denominations on the Society's platform often cheer each other as meeting there on the basis of a common Christianity, are all in perfect consistency with its being a union of individual Christians. "*The constitution of a society is simply a compact between individuals, for the purpose of accomplishing a certain object in a specified manner.*"

But suppose the Society were a union of *denominations, each bound by its own formularies*, could they unite more readily than individual Christians in issuing Tracts on the controverted aspects of *slavery*? Are not the great Baptist and Methodist churches, north and south, now *ecclesiastically divided* on this one subject of slavery? Can they unite in issuing tracts on this subject? And suppose such a geographical division were effected in this Society, how many of our other ecclesiastical bodies could be expected to remain united in the northern portion of it? Would such a division be acceptable to the Episcopal church? to the Presbyterian bodies? to the Reformed Dutch church? to all the Congregational churches? to the Lutheran or Moravian church? The great catholic bond that unites the Society being sundered, would not other separations probably soon follow, and the part remaining soon fall into the hands mainly of some one denomination to use the funds consecrated to a truly catholic object by the living and the dead, for denominational and sectional ends?

According to the theory in question the Society might plunge into POLITICS, in direct conflict with the report of the Committee of Fifteen, who avow that it "cannot be made a special organ of anti-slavery," and that "the political aspects of slavery lie entirely without its proper sphere, and cannot be discussed in its publications." Since their report was presented, it has become much more apparent that to find a proposed line of discrimination between a discussion of the "*political aspects*" of slavery, and of "*moral duties*" or "*moral evils and vices*" connected with it, is, in the present excited and prejudiced state of our country, a point of immense difficulty, if not practically beyond the reach of the most acute mind and the most benevolent heart; especially as partisans, both north and south, see in the first tract that might appear on the subject a train of anti-slavery issues.

Apply the same theory to our other great national catholic institutions, and would the results be less fatal? Could not an argument be constructed, that slavery is the sin of sins, that passages of the Bible are daily perverted for its support, that the American Bible Society is solely a union of *denominations* none of whose creeds sanction slavery, and as the phrase "*all evangelical Christians*" in the constitu-

tion of one Society, "o the phrase "without note or comment" in that of another, must bend to the absorbing demand, and even that Society *must* issue comments on slavery.

In a word, all these arguments are in spirit antagonistic to Christian union. The one question is, Shall all our national or other catholic Societies be sundered, their constitutions violated, their funds perverted, their solemn covenants with God and men broken, by the one great divisive and now political subject of slavery?

The Publishing Committee, seeking light from on high, have endeavored to honor Christ in the salvation of men by treating all subjects in accordance with the principles of the Society and the inspired word—*unconscious of having ever espoused, in their official relations, either side of any controversy by which the people of God are unhappily sundered.* They see no other principle of action to be pursued in fulfilling their responsibilities.

Is it right, that intelligent ministers and Christians, long tried friends and supporters of the Society, daily breathing the prayer that Christ's redeemed people may be one in Him as He is one with the Father, should so yield themselves to local or sectional feelings or misapprehensions as even in their hearts to censure brethren they love and esteem, for declining to execute the demands of a part, in opposition to the known will of other large portions of its constituency—in other words, for their faithful and conscientious, it may be self-denying and enlightened discharge of official duty? God is judge, and he may show that they have acted as all wise and conscientious men in a full view of the facts must have acted under the responsibilities resting upon them.

With some care and fidelity in the hope of correcting various misrepresentations, freely consulting with fellow-laborers, among them our late lamented chairman the Rev. Dr. Knox who was one of the Society's founders and acted on the Publishing Committee till his death, we have given the above statements, including those referring to the Society's organization and the drafting of its constitution, chiefly from the personal knowledge of one or more of us, as we expect to meet them here on earth and in the judgment. We commend them to our brethren of every name and locality, and to God who holds all hearts and controls all events.

WM. A. HALLOCK,
O. EASTMAN,
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